

Stage: 'Castro Complex'

Comedy at the Stairway Analyzes a Crush

By MEL GUSSOW

Betsy Kress has a compulsive crush on Fidel Castro. Hence the title of the play, "The Castro Complex," that opened Wednesday night at the Stairway Theater.

In order to consummate the crush, she forces her fiancé to put on false beard and fatigues, puff a cigar in her face (it makes him choke), fake a Cuban accent, slap her around, then push her into bed with him.

"I don't think this makes for a very healthy relationship," says the reluctant suitor. It also doesn't make for a very funny play.

In the ensuing two acts, Mel Arrighi, the playwright, reveals a little more about Betsy, some of it even less intriguing than her Castro-philia. She once had a Pat Boone complex, which would have made a worse play. At one point, her fiancé suggests, "Have you ever thought of going into analysis?" one of the few good ideas he has.

The heroine is played by Marian Hailey, with an endearing eagerness. There are those moments when you believe she really is hung up on Castro. The actress is appealing. Someone should write a play for her. This isn't it.

Terry Kiser is the fiancé, Hadley Marcus, who has a facial tic, a suspicious mind and a foolish manner. It is not Mr. Kiser's most demanding role.

Plot enters in the person of Paco Montoya, who is either an Argentine revolutionary in flight from the Central Intelli-

The Cast

THE CASTRO COMPLEX, a comedy by Mel Arrighi. Directed by James Burrows; setting by Kert Luidell; lighting by Roger Morgan; costumes by John J. Whitmore; production stage manager, Gail Hubbard. Presented by Jeff Britton; associate producer, Sidney Annis; assistant to the producer, Erlinda Zeffin. At the Stairway Theater, 235 West 46th Street.

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| Betsy Kress | | Marian Hailey |
| Hadley Marcus | | Terry Kiser |
| Paco Montoya | | Raul Julia |

gence Agency or a Puerto Rican who runs a gift shop on St. Mark's Place. Whoever is after him is downstairs. He is hiding upstairs in Betsy's attic apartment being pursued by the heroine. He has a beard and fatigues, and he says Castro is like a brother.

Trying to cool off the persistent Betsy, he announces, "The Fidel I know is a tired middle-aged man with a big paunch," one of the play's funnier lines. As played by Raul Julia, Paco provides most of what small enjoyment there is in this comedy. But the smart, wisecracking Puerto Rican is in danger of becoming a stage convention.

There are occasional farcical elements in the production, which can perhaps be attributed to the director, James Burrows. If so, he should have restrained himself. "You married?" Hadley grills Paco. "You got a girl? You a faggot?" Paco leaps at Hadley's throat and Hadley jumps up a ladder. Remember this is an attic apartment. That means there is also much peeping and shouting out the window at those supposed C.I.A. agents.

The superimposed action cannot conceal the thinness of the material. Some plays have second-act trouble. I think this one founders on its premise.